

# Home Life on Early Ranches of Southwest Texas

## CHAPTER XXVI

Robert Henry  
Robertson County

"REMOVE not the ancient landmark which thy father has set" is an ancient proverb. But it might be a proverb of Henry Seale, who is living today on the old home place established by his grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Henry, one hundred and ten years ago. He lives in a beautiful modern two-and-a-half-story house. In front of it winds a hard-surface highway over which automobiles *whiz* past; above airplanes roar from one great metropolis to another.

Just a few hundred yards from the house is a marker, which reads: "A Royal highway, *El Camino Real*, the old San Antonio road blazed in 1691 by Don Domingo Teran de Las Rios, the first Provincial Governor of Texas, so expressed and ordered by the King of Spain."

The comfortable home of Henry Seale and the modern methods of transportation are indeed contrasts to the crude home and methods of travel of his pioneer grandparents.

On this place the Robert Henrys reared their family. There his parents reared a family, and there he and Mrs. Seale have reared their family. Their children have married and established homes of their own. Mrs. Seale continues to direct the many household activities, attend the woman's club and do church work. Mr. Seale, eighty years of age, continues to direct his farming and ranching activities. Although he is president of the First State Bank and Trust Co. in Bryan, six miles away, his first interest is on the farm and ranch. Daily he rides over the place, giving instructions and personally supervising the work. His love of horses and cattle is equal to that of his grandfather, Robert Henry, whose family is the subject of this story.



MRS. ELIZABETH DOWNING HENRY

Robert Henry was only nineteen years old when he married Betty Downing in 1820. She was two years older. They had grown up in the same community in Ireland. As the daughter of a large linen miller she had been given the best educational opportunities of that time. But she was truly a pioneer, and she shared Robert Henry's love and reverence for land.

They had heard stories of the opportunities in America, especially in Texas, and before their wedding, they had made plans to come to Texas immediately.

Would they have reversed their decision to go to the New World if they could have foreseen the toils, hardships and fighting? I don't believe they would. Because, with lifted heads and firm chins they played their part fearlessly on the stage of the early development of Texas, with a vision of today and its progress, and a determination to succeed.

Just after their wedding they bade farewell forever to Ireland and to their relatives and friends and boarded a ship bound for South Carolina, from whence they expected to eventually arrive in Texas. This itself was a test of their

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courage. For the ships in those days were not the floating palaces that ply rapidly back and forth across the Atlantic today. They were slower going and poorly equipped to combat the terrible storms. With a song on their lips and hope in their youthful hearts they set sail. They were driven back by a terrific storm. They started again, and after three months of alternate smooth seas and riding storm-crested waves they reached South Carolina.

Coming on to Texas immediately was out of the question. Covered wagons drawn by ox teams traveled slowly over rough roads and deep, dangerous unbridged streams. Travelers were in constant danger of attacks from marauding savages. So they stayed with a community of immigrants in South Carolina for a year.

While Robert Henry was busily making a crop of cotton and corn, Betty was learning the art of pioneer housekeeping. In addition, she was ever ready to nurse the sick. She did it because she was sympathetic and to be helpful. This later enabled her to be an angel of mercy to many pioneer families in the Brazos River bottom of Texas.

As they sat in the soft glow of the pine knots in the huge fireplace built in the center of their first log room home, they talked about old times in Ireland, the meager news of the community, but most of all, about Texas. To be sure little was known about it. It was under the jurisdiction of Mexico, but colonization was being encouraged. People could by pre-emption get a league of land. In Ireland land had been scarce. Just think of owning nearly 5,000 acres! There was an abundance of wild game, buffalo, deer, cattle, fowls and birds of all



Left—Henry (R. H.) Seale, grandson of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Henry, who lives on the Henry stock-farm established in 1829. Mr. Seale is now 80 years old. Right—House on the Robert Henry stock-farm near the line of Robertson and Brazos counties. In the car are Mr. and Mrs. F. A. Capps. Mrs. Capps is a grand-daughter of the Henrys.

kinds! The soil was rich! Yes, it was the "promised land."

After making a crop they, with several other families, started overland for Texas. Their clothing, bedding, and necessary articles of houseware were loaded on a covered wagon drawn by two well-broke oxen. Cooking could be done with a teakettle, skillet and lid as easily over an outdoor camp fire as over the fireplace in their cabin home, and potatoes could be baked in the hot ashes at night. Betty Henry liked to cook.

Travel was slow. They sometimes made twenty to thirty miles a day over the unkept roads, but not often. Frequently they were very rough roads, sometimes covered with rocks and sometimes with great ruts cut deep in mud.

The greatest difficulty was in crossing the streams. There were few bridges and they crossed the deeper rivers on "pontoon ferries." These were large rafts made of logs fastened together. They were floored with rough hewn boards and held in place by a cable, and were pulled across the stream by strong ropes.

They stopped in Alabama for a few years. Robert Henry continued to farm and to learn more about the new country. But Texas was still his goal.

Finally the time came when they could pile their belongings into the wagon and again start for Texas. Their two children, Hugh and Kitty, increased their pleasure and the responsibilities of traveling. Several families came together. The huge covered wagons, heavily loaded with household goods, the horses with their riders leading still others, formed quite a caravan. Slowly they started on their westward trek. Some of the families were *Blue Stocking* Presbyterian. The Henrys were among that number and would not travel on Sunday. They claimed to have arrived at their destination first and without any loss.

There was not a family in all that group of immigrants which was happier than the Robert Henry's. With Hugh sitting between them and Kitty on her mother's lap, they reveled in the beauty

of the country through which they slowly passed. Excitement ran high as they approached the Mississippi River, the great "Father of Waters." Its magnitude was beyond their wildest imagination. They couldn't all cross at once. Robert Henry and the other men helped load the ferry. When his time came, with many "gees" and "haws," he carefully coaxed his oxen onto the small rickety steamboat. Betty kept a firm hold on her children. Finally, they were all aboard, the oxen were loosened from the wagon, and everything securely fastened.

"Don't be scared," was the admonition given by the captain to all passengers, "I've never lost a soul." But Betty Henry held her children tightly, and could not imagine anything more terrifying than seeing one of them sink into the muddy waves as they raised their white caps to the wind. A shrill whistle from the captain indicated they were ready to "take off." Presently the bank of the turbulent river seemed to "pull away!" And almost before they knew it they were across. But it took a long time for all the caravan to cross.

#### Over "El Camino Real"

Through swamps, river bottoms and intermittent open spaces they continued slowly. From Nacogdoches they followed over "El Camino Real." While even at that time it was about 138 years old, it was a poor road. There were practically no bridges. They would have to stop for days after rains for the roads to dry.

But they were determined to come to "the prairie," near the Brazos in what is now Robertson county.

They finally reached Texas in 1829, nine years after leaving Ireland. They had become seasoned pioneers by the time they pitched camp on land near the Brazos River. Robert Henry chose that location with river frontage in order to have a sufficient and an everlasting supply of water. The soil was fertile. The mesquite grass and wild rye were two and three feet high. Truly it was a cattleman's paradise.

While Robert was building the one-room log cabin, Betty and the children were enjoying the new country. It was all so new and strange—the birds, the trees and the sluggish, muddy water of the Brazos.

There were great numbers of deer and cattle. The cattle were wilder than the deer. There were droves of wild hogs, and huge flocks of wild turkeys which had to be shot low because they were so fat that when they fell to the ground from any height their breasts would burst open. While the Henrys tried to raise some rye for bread, Betty could make excellent bread of sweet potatoes. There was an abundance of wild plums and wild berries. Later they raised peaches and a garden.

Mrs. Henry stayed alone with her children miles from the nearest neighbor while her husband was away fighting the Indians. She was not afraid. With the grass high and fresh all about her, and the birds singing in their friendly way, and deer and turkeys hardly ever out of sight, with nothing to listen to but the sounds of Nature, life was wonderfully pleasant to her and her children. One night she heard a noise which proved to be Indians trying to steal her fine horses. She went out, called them to her, and put them in the stable and locked the door. The Indians stood silently and watched her. As she put the key in her pocket and started toward the house the Comanche chief stepped forward, and patting her on the shoulder said, "Brave a heap!"

#### Indians Liked Her

Even though Mrs. Henry's husband fought the Indians for the protection of the whites, they loved her and the children. When her third child, Elizabeth, was born, a bunch of squaws came to see her and brought her presents. One of them had no present so she gave her "a drink of honey."

The nearest doctor lived in Houston, about 100 miles away. Mrs. Henry, then affectionately known as "Aunt Betty," became the doctor for the neighborhood. If the sick were not able to come to her she went to them regardless of distance or condition of weather and roads. For bruises she used a medicine called "pidlock" which was brought from Ireland. She also used roots and herbs, and seemed always to know just what to do.

She usually rode bareback to visit the sick or to see a neighbor. One day while she was riding a mare with a colt a big panther tried to attack her and the colt, but she fought it off and went on to visit her friend.

Everyone was on his own hook. Robert Henry eventually expected to farm and raise cattle. But the immediate problem was to provide protection from the Indians. So Robert Henry became a "minute man." He had to have ready a bag of molded bullets, and his horse near enough to be saddled at a moment's notice, and go wherever needed. When he left both knew the dangers he faced, and the probability of his death. Mrs. Henry was often left alone with her children, in charge of the crops, and in care of the cattle they were beginning to accumulate. She molded a new supply of bullets which were ready for Mr. Henry upon his return.

In the meantime, trouble with Mexico was brewing. The inevitable conflict between the dark-eyed Latins and fair-haired Anglo-Saxons was drawing near. The Mexicans and the American colonists distrusted each other. The Henrys had arrived in Texas just before the passage

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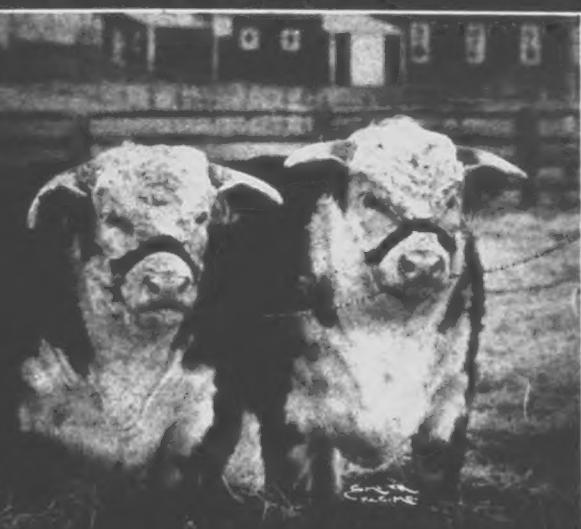
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of the Mexican law of 1830 which made it almost impossible for other Americans to come to Texas.

The Henry and Houston families were friends in Ireland, although Sam Houston and Robert Henry had not met. Robert Henry was a soldier in the Texas Army before General Sam Houston became its commander-in-chief. He was with General Houston when the army arrived at San Jacinto. The day before the battle General Houston told Robert Henry confidentially to start off with his horse as if he were taking it to water, but to ride to Dun's Fort—just above Robert Henry's home.

"I am going to fight Santa Anna tomorrow," he said. "You tell the folks up there I am going to whip him, or I won't let him whip me. If they hear the cannon they will know the battle is on."

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Mr. Henry made the trip, delivered the message, and returned to his command. The battle of San Jacinto was over, and Texas was free. Even though Robert Henry, or "Squire Henry" as he was generally known by then in the community, passed near his home he did not get to see his wife and children.

After he joined the army, Mrs. Henry was left alone with her children eight miles from the nearest neighbor. With the help of the older children she tilled the farm and took care of the cattle. She was getting along nicely when a "minute man" spread a warning that the Indians were coming.

Hastily, she prepared to leave and go to a "fort on the Sabine River" for the duration of the war. When she got to the Navasota River several other families were already there. They were not going to cross that night because the river was on a rise.

"I would rather drown than see my children tomahawked by the Indians," she declared, "And I am going across."

She rolled her baby in a blanket, put another child on a horse behind her and swam across the river. She swam back and got the other two children and the other horse and continued on her journey. For three months she traveled alone with her four children and two horses, camping out at night. Later she learned that the families who refused to cross the rising Navasota were all killed by the Indians that night.

Mrs. Henry lived in one of the huts of the fort on the Sabine for three years, where she could be protected by the men. She provided her family with food by raising a garden and doing a little farming.

### Sack Not Opened

Mrs. Henry had taken a sack of gold with her. It was too heavy to carry around, so she gave it to a man to keep for her. Several years later it was returned and the sack had not been opened.

The Henry family was reunited after the war, and things were better. They lived in a republic now and not a part of Mexico. At last Robert Henry began to do the things for which he came to Texas. He had been granted a league and a labor of land for his services in the army. Land was cheap. He secured more whenever he wanted it. There was not a fence during his life time. His rapidly increasing cattle were branded RH. They were not worth much. He tried to sell them, but they always seemed to die. Little did he think they were infested with cattle ticks which sucked the very life blood from them. It remained for his grandson, Henry Seale, to eradicate them.

Mr. Henry decided to try sheep, and bought some in Washington county. During 1839 and 1840 this industry was going fine. By using negro slaves as herdsmen, the cost was practically nothing. He sheared once and twice a year, and sold the wool in Houston, keeping enough wool to supply the family with clothing.

Horse sales were next best to the sheep. Robert Henry had brought some horses with him which he bred to some of the wild horses. A short while after settling on the Brazos he rode out onto Cedar Prairie and captured the colt of a wild mare. That was where he got his first "wild horse."

He always gave the preacher a horse to ride. One of them got killed.

"Don't worry," said Squire Henry. "I'll give you another one."

Their horses always went to the Brazos River bottom to spend the winter, but re-

turned in the spring. It was warm there and they kept fat on mesquite grass and wild rye.

Hogs yielded the greatest profit of anything on the Henry place. They ran wild and fattened on post oak mast. About the only cost of production was the time spent in marking them and taking them to market. They were marked by "a crop and under slope left ear and crop under the right ear." Three cents a pound was received for them when delivered at Calvert. It usually required seven days to make the trip to Calvert and return. Because they were so wild driving them to market was considered the hardest job of all driving of livestock. The management of such an undertaking required the utmost skill. Squire Henry always tried to engage Wesley Jones, whom he considered one of the best livestock drivers in the country, to manage his drove of

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hogs, which usually consisted of 300 five- and six-year-olds. He also sold some pork to the German settlement in New Braunsfels.

In 1840 a slave trader came through the country selling negro slaves. The Henrys considered the slaves a godsend. It enabled Squire Henry to have the necessary labor for the field work and caring for the stock. Mrs. Henry could also have much needed help in the house.

Mr. Henry decided to move about three miles from the river upon the prairie because he thought it would be more healthy. He dug a well in 1849 which is still being used today. A double log house was built near it. There were two big rooms with a hall between, a small room back of each of the large rooms, and a big porch across the entire front. A kitchen was built in the back yard. The slave quarters were placed conveniently near.

The entire family was proud of the big house heated by huge fireplaces in the ends of each of the big rooms. The solid walnut furniture was made in Huntsville and brought overland in a wagon.

Slave labor had enabled Squire Henry to extend his cotton farming. The cultivation and picking of the cotton was done mostly with slave labor. Lint cotton was carded, spun, and woven into cloth. This, with the wool produced on the place, supplied the clothing for the Henry family and for their slaves.

#### Separating Lint and Seed

While spinning and weaving was a big job, the greatest difficulty was in separating the lint from the seed. This was something the children could do and each child—black and white—had to pull out each night enough seed from the lint to fill his shoes before he could go to bed.

Squire Henry was always in the front ranks of every progressive move that would be helpful to himself or to the community. He built the first horse gin in that section of the country in 1840 on the edge of Red Top Prairie. There was great rejoicing among the children because their "seed-pulling" days were over.

The Henrys were noted for their hospitality and generosity. It was easier to entertain now and "Aunt Betty" was an excellent manager. She trained some of the slaves to card, to spin and weave, to sew, while others did the cooking, washing and ironing. Although she was relieved of much of the drudgery there was still plenty to do. The "candle light" had been replaced by kerosene lamps. It was not until 1869 (four years after her husband's death) that she bought a cook-stove. But she did not like it. Biscuits were better cooked in the "skillet and lid." Spareribs were roasted to a delicious brown on a hook in front of the fireplace. And potatoes were still the best ever when baked in the hot ashes.

No work of any kind was permitted in the Henry home on Sunday, not even by the slaves, so great quantities of food were cooked on Saturday. Sunday was really a day of rest and church attendance.

But there was much joy and happiness intermingled with the sorrows and hardships of the Henry family. Some of the babies died at birth or when very young. As the children grew older they entertained with play parties. They danced the stately old square dances and the Virginia Reel. Dr. Bill Rogers was a favorite "fiddler" for the dances. People would ride horseback forty miles to attend a party or a dance. Christmas was

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a great occasion marked by feasting, parties and visiting. Everybody celebrated. For days "Aunt Betty" kept the women of the Henry household busy cooking cakes, pies, roasting meat, turkey, ham and beef. With the cupboard full of good things already prepared company was very little trouble.

Fourth of July celebrations were great occasions which the Henrys enjoyed. There was usually a big picnic on the prairie. "We ate barbecue all day and danced all night," was a common expression. Robert Henry's personal friend, Sam Houston, the hero of Texas, was frequently the orator of the day. After the speaking was over he joined in the dances with the Henry girls.

The Henrys were staunch Presbyterians. Every Sunday if at all possible the entire household went to church. The slaves were taken with them. During the summer they attended the protracted meetings. The preachers for these meetings were usually fine upright, Christian men. However, one of them proved to be a horse thief. There were no fences, which made it easier for the thieves. They did not steal the cattle because they were not worth it. This "stealing parson" evidently was an organizer. While he preached he had his partners to steal horses. One of his horses was shot by some men trying to capture the thieves. The horse went straight to the preacher's meeting place. A negro there told them the preacher had sent the men to steal the horses. But the preacher "skipped the country" before the men realized he was the leader of the thieves. However, they followed him to the Mississippi River and hung him.

Meanwhile as Robert Henry's livestock industry expanded, and as his big crops of cotton grew bigger, he was happier than he as a young man ever hoped to be. There was plenty of land to be had and it was cheap. He kept getting more and more of it. His sons and daughters were marrying fine young women and men, and establishing farms and ranches

of their own. There was even plenty of land for them. This would not have been possible in Ireland because of crowded conditions.

Hugh married Liza Foley; Kitty married Dr. Wham. After his death, she married Alec Nesbit. Elizabeth married C. C. Seale. Mary married Bird Seale. Margaret married Jim McMillam.

They loved the home their parents had founded for them. They married there, had big wedding suppers, then went to the groom's home the next day for the "infair dinner," and a big dance that night.

The Civil War came and ended. The slaves were free, but not one of them would leave the Henry home.

Robert Henry died in 1865 with his family and former slaves living near him on the place where he had lived since 1829.

Mrs. Henry divided the property among the children, keeping the money for herself. She made her home with one of her daughters, but visited around with her other daughters and sons. She knitted and pieced quilts, and was an ever welcome guest in her children's homes. In 1881 she was laid to rest by the side of her husband in the family cemetery.

In all certainty Robert Henry and Elizabeth Downing Henry were two people who never turned their backs; who marched forward abreast, and never doubted that the clouds would break.

## Turner Ranch Auction Highest Since 1921

WHEN people want to buy good Herefords it seems that the weather cannot stop them from going to where they can be found. This was brought out at the Turner Ranch's first annual sale at Sulphur, Okla., on January 8, when 54 head sold for an average of \$1,022, establishing a new high mark for many years. The worst blizzard of the season hit that country on January 6 and the morning of the sale it was still extremely cold and the roads were almost a solid sheet of ice, making driving extremely hazardous, as several found out to their sorrow.

In spite of these adverse conditions some 800 people from 17 states, Canada and South America were represented at the ringside when Colonel A. W. Thompson called the sale to order, although only a few had been on the grounds during the morning.

The first animal in the ring was the International grand champion Gordon Rupert. This bull was undefeated in class all season and was a member of the season's ranking get-of-sire. He was by Prince Rupert and was out of Miss Double Domino by Double Domino, his calving date being May 5, 1938.

Crappo Farms, Swartz Creek, Mich., started the bidding at \$3,000 a. d. it rose quickly to \$5,000, with breed "s" from several states and Argentina being represented in the contest. After he passed this mark it was a "two-horse race" between Wm. Moore, Willow Creek Ranch, Belt, Mont., and Jas. Pace of Girdler Farms, Shelbyville, Ky., with the latter finally nosing out his rival on a bid of \$5,800. Alabama was the victor in the next race, which was for two-year-old bull, T. Prince Rupert 7th, by Prince Rupert, that had won the championship

# ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP



ACH cattlemen in the country is confronted with many problems which can be divided into two groups in relation to the manner in which they affect him: first, individual interests, and secondly, common interests.

Individual interests are those which the cattlemen can and must solve himself: feed, labor, water and miscellaneous details of running a ranch or stock-farm. These problems are met within the confines of one's fence.

Common interests are those which each cattlemen shares with every other man engaged in the business. Group action alone can furnish the necessary operating machinery. Each cattlemen knows the success of his business is just as much dependent upon favorable freight rates, marketing practices and charges, legislation, finance, meat consumption, and the like as upon any individual livestock question.

Necessity for organized effort to handle common interests has caused each trade or business to form its association. It brought into being organizations for labor and capital. Livestock producers in each large geographical division of the country formed representative bodies, and among the first was the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association, Inc.

Membership in the Association is open to any cattlemen recommended by responsible parties. There are cattlemen in every section of the Southwest who should become members and lend this organization their moral and financial support. We appeal to them to come in with us, give us the benefit of their counsel, and contribute their part of the funds necessary to maintain a strong representative association for the cattle producers of the Southwest.

The Association maintains brand inspectors on all central markets to which any number of cattle are shipped from southwestern ranges. Proceeds of cattle bearing the brand of a member are held pending investigation for ownership, unless the inspector has reason to believe such cattle are being handled by authorized parties. Field men are stationed at important range centers to inspect out-bound shipments, investigate reported losses of cattle, and serve the organization in any way possible. An attorney is employed to assist in the prosecution of parties indicted for theft from a member and to represent the Association before the State and National legislative bodies. Our traffic counsel represents the industry in all important transportation matters.

Charges incident to membership are based on the number of cattle rendered, which number is to be the same as turned in for taxes in the various counties. The assessment charge is seven and one-half cents a head per year. There are fixed charges each member pays without regard to the number of cattle rendered: \$5.00 annual dues; and \$1.00 a year for subscription to "The Cattlemen."

The strength of any representative organization is entirely dependent upon the support given it and the number of persons or composite assets it is authorized to represent. The more members the Association has, the more effective will be its efforts to promote and safeguard the common interests of the range livestock producers and stock-farmers of Texas and adjacent states.

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